

Have you heard about the Library Services for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing?

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You may be thinking, “Why is there a need for a special library for people who are deaf? I understand that blind people can’t see and therefore can’t read in the traditional sense, but what prevents a deaf person from reading? Most people who are deaf have functioning eyes, right?” So, what kind of library is this?

History

The Library Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing began in August 1978 as a means for people who were Deaf to access information that the hearing public takes for granted: international, national, state and local news, weather reports and sports reports available through television and newspapers. People who were Deaf had limited access to this information because of low English literacy rates and extremely limited captioning on television (the ABC Nightly News rerun on the local PBS station at 10:30 p.m. was the only news available)

The local Nashville Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc (TDI) agent, Lloyd Billingsley, designed an automated Teletype (TTY) News Service to provide accessibility to this information. At the time, even telephone usage was relatively new to people who were deaf. TDI was the organization that acquired obsolete teletype machines and reconditioned them for usage in the home. (See <http://www.tdi-online.org> for more information on TDI.)

Because Lloyd worked the evening shift laying out the morning newspaper, *The Tennessean*, he missed the captioned version of the national news. Ironically, the newspaper was written above his language level. Nonetheless, he was very interested in the world around him. So in 1977

he submitted his design for a TTY News Service to Lillias Burns, Special Projects Coordinator of the Nashville Public Library. Because people who are Deaf often learn American Sign Language as their native language, English is learned as a second language. Therefore, Burns was able to acquire federal LSCA English as a Second Language (ESL) funds to start the "Library Service for the Deaf" on August 16, 1978.

Program Mission: Then and Now

Beginning in February 1979, the Library Service for the Deaf program began expanding its scope beyond the TTY News Service to include collection development and accessible programming. New services and programming were added as needs in the deaf and hard of hearing communities were identified and funding was secured. Many changes took place within the first five years of the program. Most notably, because of the quality and size of this special collection, the program expanded from serving Nashville residents only to a statewide program in 1983.

The program has continued to evolve to this day. Here is the current mission statement:

The mission of the Library Services for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing is to provide materials; informational, cultural and accessibility programming and services about deafness, hearing loss, and deaf-blindness to people involved with or experiencing hearing loss and deaf-blindness in Tennessee so they can enjoy a better quality of life.

Funding

Federal LSCA grant funding supported the program while it was a local service. However, its expansion to a statewide program presented new challenges for funding which have been addressed on several occasions through the years with 1) appropriations from the Tennessee State Legislature to the Library Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; 2) a variety of grants, primarily LSCA and LSTA Direct Service grants; and 3) support from the Nashville Public Library. The program is currently funded by the state legislature and administered by the Nashville Public Library through an annual grant contract.

Collection Development

Based upon the unique challenges and the mission of the public library to provide information and reference assistance to individuals, families, and the larger community, the LSDHH collection has been developed since the beginning with a two-prong approach in mind:

1. to accommodate the information needs of people who are experiencing deafness, hearing loss, and deaf-blindness;
2. to provide information to people involved with persons who have a hearing loss or deaf-blindness.

Begun in 1979, the collection is probably the largest public library collection of materials relating to all aspects of deafness and hearing loss in the country, boasting close to 10,000 items.

Lending Collection

The lending collection consists of print materials (books), media programs (VHS videocassette tapes, DVDs, and CD ROMs), and adaptive equipment. A reference collection of academic and consumer periodicals is available, as well.

Categorical bibliographies of books representing approximately 70 subject areas including Adult, Young Adult, Children's, Fiction and Nonfiction books are available by subject category. Topics range from coping with hearing loss as we age to deaf culture to the psychological and sociological impact of hearing loss.

A "Media Resources Catalog" includes both a subject index and an annotated listing of each media title in the collection. The extensive collection includes instructional, entertaining, and informative programs for people of all ages.

Several Assistive Devices are available for loan including TTYs, Uniphones (Telephone/TTY combination), Amplified Telephones, and Assistive Listening Devices (PockeTalker II, a Personal one-on-one FM system, and an infrared device for the television).

Loan Rules

Eligibility

Any person living in the state of Tennessee may borrow materials from the collection. Nashville/Davidson county residents use their Nashville Public Library cards to borrow materials, while all other Tennessee residents complete a Library Services for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing Application (Tennessee residency is confirmed through mailing the application to a location in the state.)

Loan Period

All materials have a 3-week loan period, beginning on the date the materials are shipped out. Materials may be renewed once, if there are no holds.

Shipping

The Library Services for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing pays all shipping charges.

All items *must* be shipped to an address where someone is present during the day.

Overdue Fines

\$2.00/day/media program (maximum fine \$10/item)

\$2.00/day/assistive device (maximum fine \$10/item)

\$.10/day/book (maximum fine \$4/book)

Collections & Services

Historical Collection

Items deemed to be of historical significance to the field of deafness and hearing loss have been placed into a separate "Historical Collection." These materials are also available for loan.

Reference Collection

A reference collection includes both academic and consumer magazines; books; and newsletters from organizations and educational institutions serving people who are hard of hearing, deaf, and deaf-blind.

Tennessee Directory of Services for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Staff members of the library publish this biennial statewide resource that includes an annotated listing of approximately 400 different organizations, schools, and agencies that provide services for people with a hearing loss. It may be browsed by type of service or by location (The state has been divided into 5 geographic areas including major metropolitan areas and surrounding counties). The directory is free of charge. Please contact us.

Demonstration Room

This unique room showcases a variety of special assistive devices that people who are deaf or hard of hearing can benefit from using. It includes equipment to make products such as telephones and televisions accessible, as well as special alerting systems and personal and group assistive listening devices.

Reference Services

Walk-in and telephone reference services regarding any aspect of hearing loss are available to anyone in the state of Tennessee. This service is available during our normal operating hours: 9:00 am – 5:00 pm Central Time, Monday – Friday. Call us at 1-800-342-3262 (voice or TTY) or e-mail us at: library.hearingimpaired@nashville.gov.

Other Programs and Services

Then...

The TTY News Service (August 1978 - April 2001) was the initial program of the Library Services for the Deaf. In 1979 free open captioned full-length feature films were offered once-a-month on Friday evenings at the Main Library and signed story times were available at any Nashville Public Library location.

And Now...

Many different types of programs are provided, including:

- Interpreted monthly marionette / story time performances for deaf children
- Signed story times for hearing children - teaching preschoolers about sign language and hearing loss
- Computer classes taught in American Sign Language
- Staff sign language classes
- In-service training programs for library staff (statewide)
- Cultural programming featuring deaf story tellers
- Video relay service

The most exciting event to date is the national “History Through Deaf Eyes” exhibit sponsored by Gallaudet University which will be at the Nashville Public Library March 3 – April 17, 2006. A full schedule of events is planned. Please contact us for further details.

More than 10,000 Tennesseans have used the Library Services for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing in the past 10 years. However, demographics indicate that approximately 15% of the population has a hearing loss, so there is much room for growth. As communication becomes easier through technological advances we look forward to serving even more Tennesseans.

Contact Information:

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